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The role of migrant care work in relation to child care in the Danish Social Democratic welfare state

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In Denmark, most migrant child minders have a formal role as au pairs. In 2009, 2,773 residence permits were granted to au pairs in Denmark, and in 2009 78 % of all residence permits granted to au pairs was given to women originating from the Philippines¹. Overall, however, the magnitude of the au pair phenomenon is relatively small, as total labour force amount to about 2.6 millions. The au pair phenomenon is especially common in the economic well-off neighborhoods north of Copenhagen, which is also where residences are so large that they have an extra room for an au-pair². The legal framework in Denmark for the au pair scheme was established in 1972, but it was not until the mid 1990s that the scheme really took off, as only 318 au pair residence permits was issued in 1996. In principle, the idea of the au pair scheme is to allow for a young person to stay with a host family with children under the age of 18 'on equal terms' with the other members of the family. The purpose is for the au pair to improve language and/or professional skills as well as broaden his/her cultural horizon by becoming more acquainted with Denmark. In return, the au pair participates in the host family's domestic chores (e.g. cleaning, washing clothes, cooking, babysitting) for a maximum of five hours a day, and no more than six days a week equaling a maximum of 30 hours a week. Applicants for the Au pair scheme must be between the ages of 17 and 29 (both years included) at the time of application. Au pairs are entitled to a minimum monthly allowance of DKK 3,000 from the host family as well as free food and lodging. Individuals under the au pair scheme may be granted a residence permit for up to 18 months, but no longer than the duration of their au pair contract (Ministry of Refugees, Immigration and Integration Affairs), and if the au pair wishes to change her host family, the au pair contract must be renewed. A residence permit does not include an ordinary work permit; i.e. au pairs are not allowed to work on the ordinary labour market. As the Figure 1 shows Denmark has experienced a markedly increase in the number of granted residence permits under the au pair scheme since 1994. In the period 1994-1999 the number of au pairs was relatively stable with only minor yearly increases. Much of the overall increase we can observe is due to a steep increase the last decade. Since 2005 the number of au pairs in Denmark has almost doubled. Residence permits under the au pair scheme amounted to 4% of total granted residence permits in 2008 and 5% in 2009.

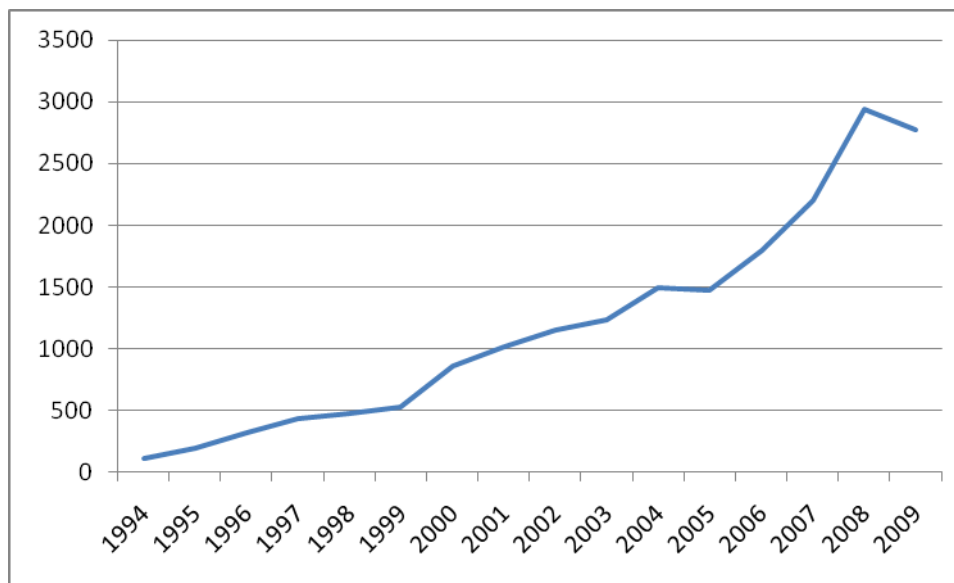
Alongside the increasing number of residence permits given under the au pair scheme the diversity among applicants has decreased. In 2000 women from the Philippines made up for around 10% of the granted residence permits under the au pair scheme where as in 2009 they represented 78%. The increasing use of au pairs as well as the decrease in diversity of the applicants has led to a debate about the future role of the scheme. Critics claims that the au pair scheme has only little to do with improving language skills and 'broadening the cultural horizon' of those involved, as described in the scheme's mission statement, as many of the Philippines are highly educated lone mothers, sending most of their income back to their family at home³. An increasing asymmetry between the way the scheme is practiced and its original intentions can be observed (Christiansen & Nielsen, 2010), and even cases of trafficking can be found (Korsby, 2010).

¹ Other major countries of origin are Ukraine, Russia, Brazil and Thailand

² Some misuse of the system has been documented. There are examples that 4 au pairs share one single rented room outside 'their' families, and that the four families share the expenses for renting the room.

³ They send money home in order to support their family, to invest or establish new companies. To be able to send as much money as possible some au pairs are practicing undeclared work in addition to the "ordinary work week" of 30 hours.

Figure 1: Residence permits granted for au pairs in Denmark, 1994-2009.



Work conditions of the domestic workers under the au pair scheme have shown to be poor. Wages of au pairs situated in Denmark most often amount to DKK 42 (€5.6) per hour (including the value of board and residence), which is considerably lower than the minimum hourly wage of DKK 103 (€13.8) (Stenum, 2008:44f), and the au pair scheme has more or less turned into a “migrant worker programme for domestic workers from third world countries” (Stenum, 2008:58)⁴. Except from au pairs, however, migrant child minders in the family household are an extremely rare phenomenon in Denmark.

Explanation

The magnitude of migrant child minders in family households in Denmark is relatively low, but rapidly increasing, and most migrant child minders assume the role as an au pair. It may be argued that child minders employed as au pairs constitute a ‘grey area’ in the labour market: work conditions are regulated by the state, but work conditions are inferior as compared to the ordinary labour market and au pairs have no citizen’s rights. Overall, however, the role of migrants in the care for children is quite limited, and the aim of this section is to give an account for the weak role played by migrant workers. To explain the particular pattern of migrant child minding in Denmark we need to look at the interrelations between the cultural orientation towards the welfare state responsibility for child care, economic traditions of the informal sector, family policy supporting public child care, as well as trust in the role of state for child care.

Cultural orientation towards welfare state responsibility for childcare

Since the early 1960s Denmark has experienced a feminization of the (formal) workforce. Between 1960 and 1990 the female labour-force participation rate increased from 43.5 to 78.5. This development was associated with processes of ‘defamilialization’ (Esping-Andersen 1999) and a shift in the dominant family model. The family structure in Denmark has moved from a ‘housewife model of the (male) breadwinner family’ to a ‘dual breadwinner/dual carer model’ (Pfau-Effinger 2004).

⁴ As such, the Danish au pair scheme seems to move in the same direction as a similar scheme in Norway. In a Norwegian study Øien observes that the Norwegian scheme does not – as intended – serve the interests of the au pair (Øien, 2009:101f).

These new tendencies nurtured new cultural orientations towards women's role in society. The idea that the housewife is essentially responsible for running the home and that good mothers must take care of their children themselves ('private childhood') definitely came to an end. It has become common for mothers with young children to be active in the labour market. The labour-force participation rate of women with children 0–2 years of age was in 2006 71.4 per cent and 77.8 per cent for women with children 3–5 years of age (OECD 2007). Only 25.6 per cent of working mothers with children between 0-16 years of age work part-time.

Table 1: Childcare for children aged 0-3 can be organised in different ways, by combining several options or by relying on only one option. In your opinion, what is the best way of organising childcare for children aged 0-3?

	Public or private day care centre/ infant school	In-house child minder or au pair	Certified child minding in a private home	Childcare predominately by the mother	Childcare predominately by the father	Childcare by both the mother and the father	Childcare by grand-parents or other relatives
Denmark	71%	18%	60%	16%	3%	28%	10%
EU27	44%	12%	16%	33%	7%	39%	23%

Source: Eurobarometer 2010, no. 321, QA49.

High female labour force participation rates and the Danish dual-breadwinner/dual-carer model have been preconditioned by a massive growth in public welfare services for children, i.e. the formation of the 'public-care' society, which in turn has shaped – or at least influenced – the overall attitude towards preferred types of childcare. As can be seen from Table 1, 71 % of Danes find that public or private day care centre/infant school is the best way of organising childcare for children 0-3 years of age, whereas 60 % are in favour of certified child minding in a private home. Surprisingly few support childcare predominantly by the mother, the father, both the mother and father, or by grand-parents. The low preference for childcare by grand-parents mirrors that this type of child care has become extremely rare. Between 1965 and 1989 the proportion of children between 0-6 years who were cared for by their grand-parents fell from 11 to 5 per cent (Christoffersen 1997).

It is quite surprising, however, that preferences for an in-house child minder or au pair is consistently higher in Denmark than in the rest of Europe. Hence, in Denmark there is a strong cultural orientation towards a substitute for a relative in the family household. The Danish dual-breadwinner/dual-carer family is obviously not self-sufficient or hostile to the 'out-side' world.

Despite the fact that Denmark compared with other European countries has the most equal distribution of men and women in the amount spent on housework (Lausten and Sjørup 2003), two career oriented spouses in the same family may challenge the work-life balance seriously, which is why many career parents choose to employ an au pair. An au pair allows for both spouses to pursue their career without a break-down in the family. An au pair is rather cheap and may function as a stress valve. The spouses are spared from undesirable tasks such as laundry, dust mounds and tired kids, while an au pair also allows for the spouses to spend time together going to the theatre, cinema etc. Actually, examples can be found that an au pair has saved the marriage of couples. It has thus been argued that an au pair supports the equality between husband and wife as neither the husband or the wife have to give up her/his career; that an au pair heightens female labour force participation rates and emancipates women (see, for instance, Berlingske Tidende 1st July 2010). But it has also been argued that the au pair system helps to reproduce the traditional gender division of labour, as Philippine women have not become emancipated and remain responsible for the household production

(see, for instance, Politiken 2nd July 2010). That is, the subordination of Philippine child minders in the household is a precondition for the emancipation and labour market integration of career oriented western women.

Economic tradition of the informal sector

Most West European countries experienced shorter or longer periods of full employment in the 1960s. To meet this challenge three options were open (cf. Kamerman and Kahn 1978): an expanded use of female labour, to make use of immigrants/foreign ‘guest workers’ or to introduce the use of new technologies, and Denmark clearly chose the ‘female labour’ path. This may explain why immigration remained modest, and even today the percentage of foreign-born and non-citizens in the total population is among the lowest in western countries (Dumont and Lemaitre 2005). In effect, no large underclass composed by immigrants emerged which has also had repercussions on the pattern of informal work.

The Danish tax authorities employ a broad definition of informal employment: They define informal employment as all kinds of productive activities which are not declared, and where both the practitioner and the purchaser gain some sort of economic advantages in the form of savings on individual and/or value-added tax. The definition does not distinguish between payment in cash and payment in kind or whether informal employment is organised as friendly turns (e.g., you helping a neighbour fix his bicycle, and he mows your lawn while you are on holiday). In principle, payments in kind and friendly turns must be declared on the tax form. A triviality limit, however, exists. Danish tax authorities turn a blind eye to non-declared income under €140 per year.

Although the regulation of informal employment is restrictive, the frequency of informal employment is high (a high proportion of the population is engaged in undeclared work), but the average duration of that undeclared work is relatively short. This seems to indicate that the primary form of informal employment is motivated by moonlighting, i.e. most often done to supplement the income of an ordinary full-time job, and/or on the basis of friendly turns. At least it has been documented that an overwhelming share of informal activities in Denmark is carried out on the basis of friendly turn (Pedersen 1998). Babysitting performed by the neighbour’s daughter is most probably the most common form of informal employment.

Danes are primarily moonlighting whereas immigrants (legal as well as illegal) work informally to escape poverty. Illegal immigrants and foreigners without working permits are mainly employed as informal workers in the hotel, restaurant, and building and construction sectors. The extent of this is not known, but the building and construction trade union estimated in 2002 that this informal employment amounted to around 1,500 full-time jobs annually.

Except from baby-sitting child care is not a sector for informal employment, and immigrant in-house child minders hardly exist. This said, until recently informal child minding was performed by native Danes due to insufficient public day-care institutions. This phenomenon, however, almost disappeared as off 2004, where a childcare guarantee for children over six months of age was introduced by the government.

Family policy supporting public child care

Two options are open in reconciling the demands of motherhood with wage work: generous maternity leave arrangements, or public provision of high-quality childcare institutions. Among the Scandinavian Social Democratic welfare states Denmark has been an outlier when it comes to reconcil-

ing the demands of motherhood, childcare, and wage work. Norway and Sweden choose the path of generous maternity-leave arrangements, but Denmark has—since the early 1960s—followed a path of using public childcare institutions (Leira 1992). Accordingly, Denmark has exhibited a massive growth in public welfare services financed by taxation which has served to reduce informal work in the child care sector. Most recent this process was further propelled as off 2004, when a new law introduced a general care guarantee which obliges municipalities to provide public day-care facilities for all children above 6 months of age. In effect, 74,000 persons – about 2.7 per cent of total employment – were employed full-time in child caring institutions in 2005.

The day care institutions are extensive, affordable and of decent quality. In 2006, 63.2 per cent of all children 0–2 years old and 96 per cent of all children 3–5 years old were enrolled in a day-care institution (Danmarks Statistik 2007). On average, the charge for a child of 0–2 years of age is about €350 monthly and €200 monthly for a child age 3–6; most municipalities grant a reduction (or sometimes, provision free of charge) to low-income families and to families with more than one child enrolled in a day-care institution, and a majority of the population (59 %) find child care services affordable. As can be seen from Table 2 a vast majority of Danes find the quality of child care services ‘good’.

Table 2: Thinking now about the quality of childcare services in (OUR COUNTRY), would you say that it is very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad?

	Very good	Fairly good	Fairly bad	Very bad		Good	Bad
Denmark	16%	65%	10%	1%		81%	11%
EU27	6%	48%	20%	4%		54%	24%

Source: Eurobarometer 2010, no. 321, QA46.2.

The good quality of childcare services in Denmark may be ascribed to highly skilled and trained kindergarten teachers who are able to stimulate the cognitive capacities of children. To become a kindergarten teacher requires 3½ years of full-time study. Still, the municipality may freely choose whether it should concentrate childcare spending on day-care institutions or publicly recognised child minders, and child minders, unlike kindergarten teachers, are not required to be educated.

Trust in the role of state for child care

In Denmark there is hardly any space for informal child care because the welfare state has more or less crowded out these forms of work. The public coverage of day care institutions is high and over-all Danes have a high degree of confidence in the educational system. 91 % of Danes show ‘Complete confidence’, ‘A great deal of confidence’ or ‘Some confidence’ in schools and the educational system, whereas only 8 % show ‘Very little confidence’ or ‘No confidence at all’ (ISSP 1998, (Q12E, v24)).

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